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ABSTRACT

This bulletin describes the use of new qualifications, the General National Vocational Qualifications (GNVQ), which have been developed in Great Britain to qualify students for admittance to higher education through the Universities and Colleges Admissions Service (UCAS). The first part of the bulletin discusses the suitability of GNVQs as a route from school or college to higher education and describes ways in which GNVQ programs might be enhanced for progression. The second part of the bulletin offers some advice and guidance on establishing agreements, supporting progression to higher education from GNVQs, between centers offering GNVQs, and universities and colleges of higher education. Examples are provided, and a checklist for establishing a GNVQ progression agreement is included. The findings in this bulletin are derived from research undertaken by UCAS and the National Council for Vocational Qualifications with higher education institutions and further education colleges. (KC)

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ED 379 525

introducing GNVQs

GENERAL NATIONAL VOCATIONAL QUALIFICATIONS AND PROGRESSION TO HIGHER EDUCATION

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February 1995

FOREWORD

In 1994 just over 900 students studying for General National Vocational Qualifications at the Advanced level applied for courses at universities or colleges of higher education through the Universities and Colleges Admissions Service (UCAS). This bulletin describes the use of these new qualifications, sometimes called 'vocational A levels', in student progression to HE.

The first part of the bulletin discusses the suitability of GNVQs as a route from school or college to HE and describes ways in which GNVQ programmes might be enhanced for progression. The second part offers some advice and guidance on establishing agreements, supporting progression to HE from GNVQs, between centres offering GNVQs and universities and colleges of HE.

The findings in this bulletin are derived from research undertaken by UCAS and the National Council for Vocational Qualifications (NCVQ) with higher education institutions (HEIs) and research and development carried out by FEU with sixth-form and further education colleges. UCAS, NCVQ and FEU hope this bulletin will be useful to all those involved with GNVQ students wishing to progress into HE.

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INTRODUCTION

GNVQs were announced in the Department for Education (DFE) White Paper *Education and Training in the 21st Century* (May 1991).

One of the main objectives set for the new qualifications was to provide a genuine alternative to GCE A levels for students staying on in full-time education beyond age 16. The qualifications were to be different from other qualifications in a number of key respects:

- Although designed as vocational qualifications, GNVQs were to be aligned with other qualifications — significantly GCE A levels and GCSEs. In particular, Advanced GNVQs were designed to be of comparable standard to GCE A levels and each of the Advanced GNVQs 12 vocational units was to be comparable in its demand and coverage to one-sixth of a GCE A-level qualification (so making the vocational units, in total, the equivalent of two GCE A levels).
- GNVQs were designed so that they could be taken in combination with other qualifications, or units of qualifications. Some students aiming for Advanced GNVQs, for example, would also take a GCE A level, while other students might choose to take units from other qualifications, or additional GNVQ units.
- The new qualifications were designed to provide a broad-based vocational education. As well as requiring vocational study, they would require achievement in a range of core skills, so providing a qualification from which students could progress to FE and HE as well as to employment and further training.

The introduction of GNVQs has the potential to increase participation and achievement rates. GNVQs can provide schools and colleges with a means of attracting new groups of students into education. In particular, GNVQs are attractive as an alternative route to HE for those students for whom GCE A-level-type learning and achievement is less appropriate. In this way, GNVQs can assist HEIs recruit more non-GCE A-level students and, in turn, this could lead to an increase in the numbers of students progressing to HE. GNVQs also cover new areas of vocational study, such as Manufacturing, or offer new combinations (for example, Health and Social Care) so are particularly appropriate as a preparation for those vocational areas where more traditional qualifications have been found wanting.

GNVQS AND HE

Not all GNVQ titles will be generally available until September 1995 and so graduates from some GNVQ titles are unlikely to enter HE before September 1997. However, the rapid introduction of the first five titles in 1992, followed by another three titles in 1993, has meant that schools, colleges and HEIs have already had to deal with GNVQs as a progression route to HE for some students.*

Advanced GNVQs are suitable for progression to HE. Indeed, 85% of the first cohort of Advanced GNVQ students who applied to HE for courses beginning in 1994 received an offer of a place. However, the suitability of Advanced GNVQs as a progression route to HE will be influenced by the standard or level of the HE programme and the content of subject matter of the GNVQ in question.

For some students the most obvious progression route will be to vocationally focused Diploma or Certificate programmes in a similar vocational area, or subject, to the GNVQ: for example from a GNVQ in Hospitality and Catering to a Higher National Diploma or Certificate in

* GNVQs in Art and Design, Business, Health and Social Care, Leisure and Tourism, and Manufacturing were piloted in 1992 and made generally available in 1993. GNVQs in Construction and the Built Environment, Hospitality and Catering, and Science were piloted in 1993 and generally available in 1994.

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Hotel, Catering or Institutional Management. Other students might choose to further specialise as they progress to a Diploma or Certificate programme: perhaps moving on from a GNVQ in Art and Design to an HND in Furniture Design.

Some students with Advanced GNVQs will wish to progress to vocational degree programmes, and GNVQs have been designed to provide a better preparation for the content of vocational degree programmes than most other qualifications. So, for example, most HEIs offering degrees in Business Studies look favourably on the Advanced GNVQ in Business as a preparation for this degree. However, although progression from Advanced GNVQs to non-vocational degree programmes in a related subject is possible — for example, to degrees in Sociology or Psychology from the Advanced GNVQ in Health and Social Care — the Advanced GNVQ on its own is less likely to be perceived as an adequate preparation for these degrees.

Advanced GNVQs can also prepare students for higher study in an unrelated subject, especially where the entry criteria do not include any specified subject requirements.

Although GNVQs are recognised by many HEIs for progression purposes, it is not unusual for some enhancement of, or addition to, the GNVQ to be required, especially for a student to be offered a place on a degree programme. However, this is consistent with the alignment between Advanced GNVQs and GCE A levels. Although two GCE A levels are usually the minimum requirement for entry to a degree, more than the minimum is usually required to obtain a place on the programme.

Unlike GCE A levels, however, an Advanced GNVQ programme can be customised or focused through the choice of units which make up the qualification. The programme is enhanced by the inclusion of core skills and can be extended by the addition of another qualification or additional units. The flexibility of the qualification and the programmes associated with the qualification is a major strength of GNVQs when used as a progression route to HE.

GNVQs as a progression route to HE

GNVQs are innovative. Many of the features of the qualification will be new to all those involved in post-16 and higher education. It is useful, then, to consider the strengths of each part of a typical GNVQ programme and qualification for progression purposes.

Mandatory and optional units

Because the 12 vocational units which make up an Advanced GNVQ consist of eight mandatory units (which all students must achieve), together with four optional units (selected from a list of eight or more), entry requirements for different HE programmes can specify the optional units required. Optional units offer a means of specialisation and so some will be more suitable for some HE programmes than others. In some cases, a number of optional units are clustered together as pathways: for example, those for the Advanced GNVQ in Engineering specify pathways in Mechanical, Electrical/Electronic, Motor Vehicle and General Engineering.

Some students will take GNVQ additional units as well as the mandatory and optional vocational units which make up the Advanced GNVQ. Additional units are designed to help the student specialise for progression into HE or employment and can be used to extend the GNVQ programme.

Core skills

The core skills in Application of Number and Communication are associated with the National Curriculum orders for Mathematics and English (and NCVQ has confirmed the practice of counting evidence of achievement generated through GCSE English and Maths towards core skill units in Communication and the Application of Number). However, they are not generally accepted as alternatives to the GCSEs in Mathematics and English for progression purposes: many HEIs still require successful applicants to have achieved GCSE grade C, or above, in these subjects, irrespective of core skill achievement.

The core skill units in Personal Skills — Improving Own Learning and Performance and Working with Others (which can be accredited as additional units) and in Problem Solving (which is still awaiting accreditation), can help prepare students for the type of study skills and independent learning necessary for study in HE. The student-centred approach to the collection of evidence of achievement engendered by the GNVQ assessment system is also of value here.

Portfolio of achievement

As their programme progresses, students compile a portfolio of evidence of achievement covering all of the units which make up the GNVQ. This contrasts with the way in which conventional GCE A-level achievement is usually summarised.

Some HEIs have found it useful to agree ways of using portfolios in this process. Some admissions tutors specify what part of the portfolio they would like to see; others advise on the type of evidence that might be most appropriate to offer in the progression process. In a few cases, colleges and HEIs have come to some agreement on the broad shape of pieces of work which should be included in the portfolio. Whatever the precise requirements of admissions tutors, it is very unlikely that they will have the time to examine whole portfolios in detail.

Because portfolios are compiled over time there are some instances where the portfolio can be used to help HEIs make offers to students before the end of the GNVQ programme and the publication of final results.

Where HEI departments have analysed their requirements independently of GCE A levels, as is the case nationally for Engineering, portfolios may be a better way for students to show they have the aptitudes and achievements necessary for success on HE programmes than qualification grades.

Similarly, portfolios may be more suitable for some vocational subjects covered by GNVQs than others. In some sectors, there is a long tradition of using portfolios for selection and progression purposes: for example, in Art and Design. In these cases, the status given to portfolios by the introduction of GNVQs may help standardise and strengthen existing practice.

Assessment

GNVQs are assessed through the use of assignments which are set and marked by GNVQ teachers, plus externally set tests for most of the GNVQ mandatory units, which students must pass. Successfully completed assignments, together with other evidence of achievement, are included in the portfolio. In a few cases, GNVQ centres and HEIs have agreed to design assignments together. In these cases, the assessment of the assignment can be discussed by the college or school assessor with HEI tutors.

Grading
The grading system used for GNVQs is unlike that used in other qualifications. For students to achieve a graded GNVQ, their portfolios must show evidence of achievement in the generic skills of planning, information handling and evaluation of evidence which meet criteria concerned with the quality of the students' work. These criteria, also common to all GNVQs, focus on the synthesis of knowledge, skills and understanding and on the use of the 'concepts, forms of expression and presentation used within the GNVQ vocational area or discipline' (*Grading Advanced GNVQs*, NCVQ, September 1994). Where admissions tutors are more interested in the generic skills developed in the student through the entire GNVQ programme, this approach to grading is particularly appropriate. However, where the primary concern is to differentiate vocational skills, knowledge or understanding, or to differentiate achievement in respect of a particular unit of the qualification, the GNVQ grading system is less useful. In these cases, HEIs may require applicants to offer some other forms of evidence of vocational achievement beyond that required to pass the GNVQ.

Because the grading criteria apply only to the whole qualification, a grade is not possible until the student has completed *all* the mandatory and optional units which make up the GNVQ. Similarly, any units taken by the student in addition to the qualification will not be graded and the work carried out for these units does not count toward the grade.

Extending GNVQ programmes for progression to HEI

Requirements to add to the GNVQ programme vary from HEI to HEI (and from HE programme to HE programme) for a number of reasons.

An HEI might accept the GNVQ alone for HNDs in Science, Engineering and Mathematics, for example, but require the addition of a GCE A level in Maths or a Science for entry to the BSc (Hons) programmes in these areas. Where HE programmes are over-subscribed and admissions tutors need to set fair and neutral criteria to differentiate the cohort, evidence of additional study is likely to be required for selection purposes. Requirements will also depend upon the content of the HE programme.

Evidence of specialised study
GNVQs are broader than the qualifications they may replace (typically the BTEC National Diploma), and in some cases tutors have suggested that, although the general skills and abilities are those which are necessary for HE study, GNVQs are too general for progression onto those HE programmes where a specialist knowledge base is needed (for example, those in pure sciences or languages).

Some specialisation within the GNVQ can take place through the choice of optional and additional units: for example, Advanced GNVQ Art and Design students might choose the four optional units focused on two dimensional work as opposed to the units with a three dimensional focus and/or choose GNVQ additional Art and Design units in Fine Art, rather than in the fashion/textile design area.

Alternatively, it may be necessary for students to enhance their GNVQ with another qualification — GCSEs, GCE A levels or other vocational qualifications.

GNVQs and GCE A levels
Where HEIs specify a GCE A level for entry to a particular HE programme, the specified GCE A level will usually still be needed when applicants offer a GNVQ as their main qualification for progression.

Irrespective of the need for a specified GCE A level for progression purposes, there is a tendency, at the moment, for students whose declared intention is to take a degree to be expected to take a GCE A level as well as the GNVQ.

Indeed, about 30% of students with Advanced GNVQs who applied to HE for entry in 1994 had one or two GCE A levels in addition to their GNVQ. This is not altogether surprising since GNVQs were designed with this possibility in mind, and GCE A levels have been the traditional route to HE. However, this tendency should not become the rule since it could undermine attempts to let the qualification earn parity of esteem as a route to HE. Rather, the decision to add a GCE A level to a GNVQ should only be taken after careful consideration of the benefits and drawbacks.

There can be clear benefits from combining a GNVQ and a GCE A level. It may provide the opportunity for more specialised study. For example, a student might be expected to gain an Economics GCE A level as well as an Advanced GNVQ in Business for entry to a degree in Economics.

Equally, a similar combination may be valued because of different approaches to content and even assessment. The addition of a GCE A level may also be the simplest way of making the whole learning programme more demanding.

However, there can be disadvantages in combining a GCE A level with a GNVQ. Attempting two qualifications with vastly different approaches to content and assessment can be difficult; also there is little value in students combining a GNVQ with a GCE A level if the content of the two qualifications is broadly similar. So, while a GNVQ in Construction and the Built Environment could be paired with a GCE A level in Art, combining a GCE A level in Business with the GNVQ in Business would not be sensible as the content would be too similar. Indeed, some HEIs will not recognise GCE A levels with a similar title to the GNVQ as evidence of additional study.

Evidence for entry to teacher training programmes
DFE has set out criteria for entry to courses of initial teacher training (ITT). These require all teacher training institutions and schools to satisfy themselves that *all* entrants to ITT have attained a standard equivalent to grade C at GCSE in English and Maths. In addition, from September 1998 entrants to primary initial teacher training born after September 1979 must have attained a standard equivalent to GCSE grade C in a science subject.

The criteria set by DFE do not *require* entrants to undergraduate courses of ITT to have GCE A levels, or Advanced level qualifications in a National Curriculum subject. However, it is for HEIs to satisfy themselves that successful applicants have reached a standard equivalent to two passes at GCE A level, and students who wish to teach in secondary education should hold a GCE A-level pass or equivalent qualification relevant to their main subject specialisms — which may or may not be National Curriculum subjects. Since the 12 units of an Advanced GNVQ have been designed to be comparable in their demand and coverage to two GCE A levels, the Advanced GNVQ can be accepted as a qualification equivalent to GCE

A levels. However, as with other entry qualifications and courses, it is ultimately for HEIs to decide whether an Advanced GNVQ is acceptable for entry to teacher training courses and for which subject specialisms a GNVQ may be appropriate. Similarly, it is for HEIs to decide whether to accept core skill units in Communication and Application of Number as evidence of the required standard in English and Maths and as has been noted they vary in their practice in this.

At the moment, it is likely that successful applicants to some teacher training courses will be expected to hold a GCE A level in their subject specialism. It is also likely that successful applicants will be expected to have a grade C at GCSE in English and Maths. The DFE criteria and the position on GNVQs adopted by those HEIs offering ITT should be taken into account by GNVQ centres when devising GNVQ programmes for students who wish to enter, or keep open the prospect of entering, the teaching profession.

Evidence of mathematical study
Irrespective of their level of core skill achievement, applicants to degree courses in Manufacturing, Science or Engineering subjects may well be required to show evidence of mathematical achievement expressed in GCE/GCSE terms.

Evidence of academic study
Some universities have said that GNVQs do not prepare the student quite as well as GCE A levels in the skills of writing essays or for the style of learning and assessment used on the more traditional academic degrees. In cases like these, students may be advised, for example, to study History of Art at GCE A level alongside an Advanced GNVQ in Art and Design to provide evidence that they can cope with more academic subject matter and the academic method of examination. Alternatively, candidates can be asked to show evidence of these kind of study skills in their portfolio.

A progression rationale

No matter where the student wishes to progress, but especially where the GNVQ programme needs to be extended for progression, there will be a need to balance the increased demands of an extended programme against the chances of obtaining a GNVQ grade.

Similarly, decisions will often need to be made on the proportions of specialist and broader study in a programme, and the most appropriate way of providing opportunities for any specialist study.

These decisions should not be made in a piecemeal manner, but should be informed by a predetermined rationale for each student's programme.

GNVQ tutors are strongly advised to ensure that all GNVQ programmes are constructed with a clear progression rationale. If the programme is to be extended beyond the 12 GNVQ units and the three mandatory core skill units, it should be broadened or deepened rather than simply adding to the student's workload. This will mean choosing, with the student, the optional units, additional units and additional studies or qualifications most appropriate for the progression route(s) for which the student wishes to be prepared.

It may also be necessary to construct programmes which provide the student with experience of particular learning and/or assessment activities as a preparation for HE. For this to happen, colleges and HEIs will need to exchange information, through published sources and other means, on the requirements for entry to particular HE programmes, and for colleges and students to be aware of the likely expectations from employers after completing degree study.

2. ESTABLISHING LOCAL PROGRESSION AGREEMENTS FOR GNVQS

It has been found to be mutually beneficial for GNVQ centres and HEIs to work together to establish local and/or regional agreements on GNVQ progression.

While GNVQs are establishing themselves, progression agreements are valuable in smoothing progression pathways for students and bringing to the attention of institutions the characteristics of GNVQs. They are also useful in helping to promote the vocational route to HE, so encouraging participation in HE among those who choose to take vocational qualifications. Of course, local progression agreements between schools and colleges and HEIs are not a new idea. However, even where local progression agreements pre-date GNVQs, it will be necessary to adapt and develop them as GNVQs replace the qualifications for which the agreements were made.

Some HEIs and schools/colleges use the term 'compact' to describe these kind of arrangements. This bulletin will use the more generic term 'progression agreements' to include all forms of agreement, including compacts.

The rationale for local progression agreements

Some of the current influences encouraging institutions to form GNVQ progression agreements include:

a. The importance of establishing the credibility of the Advanced GNVQ before it has fully earned 'parity of esteem' with GCSEs and GCE A levels.

b. The need to establish a dialogue with HEIs on:

- the acceptability of GNVQs for particular HE programmes;
- how admission procedures will process GNVQ applicants;
- whether particular GNVQ units are preferable for particular HE destinations.

c. The desire to protect the percentage of students traditionally progressing to local HEIs. This is particularly important where GNVQs replace programmes such as BTEC National in Business and Finance or General Art and Design, where there has been a high percentage progression rate to HE, but less so where more employment-related programme areas are replaced by GNVQs.

Perhaps the most important advantage of establishing local progression agreements is for the student. Progression is likely to be easier when the HEI is consulted over the type of assignments, experiences and processes in which the student

is involved. Students can only benefit, and be better motivated, from making well-informed choices, being better prepared for the selection process and having a far clearer idea of the expectations of HEIs.

Where schools and colleges have formed progression agreements they have found themselves in advantageous positions in terms of:

- securing progression for their students to local HEIs;
- recruiting students through a better promotion of the GNVQ as a route to HE;
- raising the awareness of the demands of HE among students, perhaps by developing 'HE tasters';
- gaining knowledge of what HEIs will accept in terms of GNVQs and additional studies and so better advising students on applications to HE;
- involving HE staff in the design and delivery of GNVQ programmes;
- ensuring that HE admission criteria are based on fair and accurate information of achievement;
- developing systems appropriate for all HEIs as a consequence of highly developed local experiences.

The advantages for HEIs include:

- help with meeting government targets which suggest that at least one in three of young entrants will come through the GNVQ route in the near future;
- gaining experience and knowledge of the features of GNVQs, feeder schools and colleges;
- safeguarding numbers by establishing links with the new programmes and ensuring early intelligence on the numbers of suitably qualified and prepared students — this can reduce annual admissions through the universities entrance 'clearing' system and make the achievement of recruitment targets easier to manage;
- the opportunity to recruit students who have been introduced to the demands of HE, possibly through 'HE tasters';
- the opportunity to inform the design of GNVQ programmes by suggesting preferred optional units or additional studies;
- the opportunity to contribute to the establishment of other progression criteria, such as satisfactory completion of a personal development programme;
- preparing for the effect of possible changes to student maintenance awards which may encourage study at local HEIs — this could result in competition between neighbouring HEIs;
- assisting in meeting any local mission statements and/or the broadening of local or regional opportunities for access to HE.

Initiating local progression agreements

GNVQ progression arrangements or compacts can be initiated in a variety of ways.

Some progression agreements grow from the need for colleges and HEIs to exchange information on the new qualifications. Others grow out of the need to review or adapt established links in the light of qualification reforms, or are informed by the existence of previous arrangements for other qualifications. Progression agreements for Access programmes and HE franchising can be a valuable background for GNVQ progression agreements.

In some cases, schools or colleges have approached HEIs. In other cases, HE admissions tutors have approached schools and colleges.

Once the first contact has been made, there will usually be a need for a continuing dialogue to discuss the implications of grading, the rigour of assessment, the removal of procedures which could disadvantage students and the possibility of HE staff advising on choices of additional studies and the combinations of units.

Different forms of GNVQ progression agreements

A range of agreements is possible, from the very informal to the formal, and from agreements between many schools and colleges and more than one HEI to agreements between individual schools or colleges and the managers of particular programmes at an HEI. The table below shows the variations of agreement within one institution.

Sheffield Hallam University

Sheffield Hallam University has identified three positions of varying formality for involvement with schools and colleges. The choice of involvement will be made according to whether the university programmes recruit on a national or regional basis and whether the programme is over-subscribed. The three positions can be summarised as follows:

Minimum Position	GNVQ recognised for entry purposes and information is given to potential applicants and GNVQ centres via the prospectus on *preferred* units of study where option areas have significance in terms of university course content.
Middle Position	*Required* option units clearly specified in the prospectus.
Maximum Position	University schools/departments become involved at the curriculum design level of the GNVQ programme in order to ensure that students are adequately prepared for the HE programme.

So, where recruitment is local and the programme under-subscribed, a department might become involved in the design of a GNVQ programme and reach some formal agreement to interview candidates. In contrast, where recruitment is national (for example, for highly specialised subjects) or there is no need to stimulate recruitment, the less formal arrangements will suffice.

Some GNVQ progression agreements merely record an agreement that the HEI will interview GNVQ holders for certain courses, while others give details of monitoring mechanisms, reports to be produced and tasks to be completed in order to customise programmes to particular courses. The degree of formality will depend upon the scope of the agreement (it may include all or only some GNVQs) expectations about its duration (longer agreements may need to be more formal to allow for review and revision) and local contexts and circumstances.

Interestingly, a high degree of satisfaction is reported from HEIs involved in a range of GNVQ progression agreements, both informal and formal. The only concerns expressed by HEIs relate to time, funding and administration and not the degree of formality. Some GNVQ co-ordinators have reported that a fairly informal collaboration with admission tutors for various courses was useful, and achieved more quickly than would have been the case if they had entered into a more formal agreement at an institutional level.

The strength of less formal agreements is that they can be established quickly, can accommodate different approaches from both the GNVQ centre and HEI, are responsive to change and do not demand policy and administrative resources. Indeed, in the early stages of any collaboration the commitment of individual staff may be more relevant than the formality of agreement.

It is unlikely that all departments within an HEI will need GNVQ progression agreements with a local school or college. For this reason HEIs might choose to encourage GNVQ progression agreements on a departmental basis within an overall structure determined by the academic and/or admissions policies and authorities. Essential criteria, and perhaps procedures, within which preferential offers have to be made could be determined centrally. However, the initiation of progression agreements could be left to departmental or faculty heads and admission tutors.

The guarantee of an interview at an HEI

One of the more typical less formal agreements simply records the willingness of the HEI to interview students who have reached a certain standard or gained specified qualifications. Some HEIs guarantee an interview to all applicants with a pass at Advanced GNVQ, if they request it; others set more stringent requirements for an automatic interview, and some guarantee interviews to applicants with a range of qualifications. For example, an HEI might guarantee an interview to students with three GCE A levels, or an Advanced GNVQ plus six additional units (or equivalent such as a GCE A level or two AS levels).

Other less formal agreements might also include some guidance on optional units, preferred additional studies and qualifications and grades. Some include general guidance on the type of activities expected of students at application for successful progression.

Agreements concerned only with guaranteeing GNVQ applicants an interview at the HEI are best informed by the protocol produced by the joint UCAS/NCVQ GNVQs and Access to HE (GATE) Committee originally for GNVQ students applying for entry into HE courses in 1994 (see Figure 1).

GATE COMMITTEE PROTOCOL FOR INTERVIEWING GNVQ STUDENTS

All higher education institutions in England, Wales and Northern Ireland are invited to agree to interview all GNVQ students applying through normal channels for entry into degree and other courses in 1994.

Higher education institutions are asked to enter into this commitment in order to prevent GNVQ students being denied access in the early stages of selection because of the novelty of the qualification. This protocol outlines how the agreement will operate.

(a) It is recognised that many higher education institutions (or departments in institutions) do not interview candidates, and that they may wish to make offers to GNVQ applicants on the strength of a record of achievement. Indeed, unlike A-level students, GNVQ students will be able to provide verified evidence of their performance before the end of their courses. Interviews may not, therefore, be necessary, unless their absence disadvantages the GNVQ applicant.

(b) Interviewing GNVQ students does not commit an institution to admit them to a degree or other course. The decision to admit students will be based upon the requirements of the course established by academic staff.

(c) The conduct of and criteria for interviews will be determined by academic staff.

(d) Institutions accepting the invitation are not committed to interviewing GNVQ students beyond 1994.

(e) The arrangement is not restricted to local compact agreements. Higher education institutions joining the compact will interview all GNVQ students applying through normal channels from anywhere in the country.

Figure 1

More formal agreements

Of course, some schools, colleges and universities will wish to establish more formal progression agreements. These agreements will tend to explain:

- **the programmes and courses covered.** Some agreements are specific to a particular GNVQ subject/title; others cover all the GNVQ titles available in a centre and/or a number of HE programmes at the HEI.
- **the requirements to be met by applicants.** Some agreements, in addition to detailing GNVQ achievement, include criteria to be met by students in relation to attendance, meeting assignment deadlines and non-certificated additional studies. Others detail the preferred choice of optional units, additional units and additional studies and any evidence to be produced by the student over and above that in the student's portfolio.

- **when applications to the HEI will be expected and the relationship between local progression systems and the UCAS system.**
  Some institutions agree early applications to give departments more time to consider GNVQ students; others interview in year one of a two-year course. In some cases, students apply through UCAS in the normal way and are then processed through any local agreement. In other cases, students are interviewed prior to application through UCAS.

- **systems for managing and monitoring the agreement.**
  Many progression agreements are managed and monitored by dedicated management and steering groups composed of individuals from the partners and elsewhere — e.g., the local Training and Enterprise Council (TEC) or local education authority (LEA).

- **duration of the agreement.**
  Some agreements have been established to last only until all GNVQs are generally available, on the assumption that, by then, GNVQs will be so well established that local agreements will not be necessary. Other agreements have a longer life span so that local objectives (e.g., changes in the profile of HEI applicants) can be brought about.

Other progression agreements have included details on interviewing. In these cases, agreement will be needed on:

- **who will interview applicants and interrogate portfolios.**
  In some cases, the GNVQ tutor assists the HE admissions tutor in the interviewing.

- **where the interview will take place.**
  A number of agreements have been negotiated so that applicants are interviewed at the GNVQ centre.

- **how the interview will be structured and what the student should take.**
  HEIs and GNVQ centres report that, although discussing the portfolio can be a crucial component of any interview, both student and staff need to consider the most effective ways of preparing and presenting a portfolio in an interview. Other agreements contain guidance for students on which parts of the portfolio the student should take to interview, and guidance for admissions tutors on what the student will bring and how it might be used in the interview.

Some agreements have covered other matters as well:

- **the co-production of promotional material.**
  This makes sure that the partners offer the public the same perceptions of the new qualifications and can help raise awareness of any agreements between institutions.

- **training and support systems for the agreement.**
  Some agreements contain references to joint staff development activities. Staff might be updated on GNVQ developments or be involved in training events dedicated to developing the skills necessary to make the agreement work.

The following are examples of more formal progression agreements showing the type of detail which might be included. (NB: the inclusion of these extracts is not meant to imply that agreements should always include such details.)

A Compact Agreement between the University of Glamorgan and Pontypridd Technical College

1. The Guarantee

The University guarantees places on higher education courses to all bona fide students who fulfil the Compact conditions and agrees to establish academic and pastoral links in accordance with the GNVQ and Access to Higher Education (GATE) Steering Committee Compact Protocol with Pontypridd Technical College. All students applying to the University through this Compact, having followed a GNVQ programme, will be guaranteed a selection interview with University staff.

Pontypridd Technical College guarantees the veracity of student Compact profiles, and agrees to keep the University informed about the progress of the first GNVQ programmes.

The College also agrees to a full programme presenting the University to students through promotional materials, speakers and campus visits.

2. The Compact

Students must fulfil the following Compact conditions:

i) to have followed a BTEC National Level course, two GCE A levels (or one A level plus two AS levels), GNVQ Level 3, or an equivalent course. Some courses may have specific subject and/or grade requirements;

ii) GCSE grade C, or above, in English and Mathematics (or equivalent);

iii) a favourable personal profile to include punctuality, attendance, commitment, communication abilities, and outside College activities;

iv) a good response to a structured personal development programme that includes study skills, careers guidance, a programme of visits to the University, economic awareness, personal computing skills, problem solving, physical education (where appropriate) and counselling;

v) a commitment after acceptance to be involved in return visits to the College to participate in the student tutoring of current pupils;

vi) a satisfactory coursework assessment in all GCE A level, BTEC or GNVQ (or equivalent qualifications);

vii) a successful record of meeting coursework deadlines;

viii) a commitment to the University as first choice in the UCCA/PCAS or UCAS offers made in the spring of the year of the commencement of a higher education course;

ix) a satisfactory selection interview, where specified on the attached schedules.

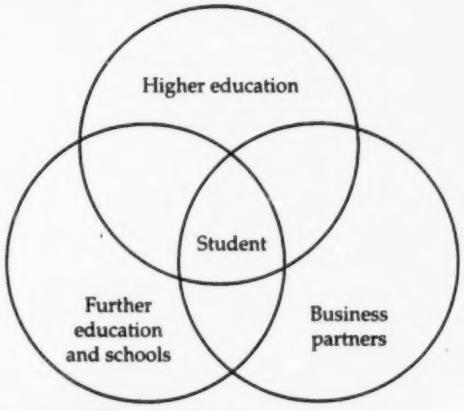
Figure 2

Figure 2 shows an extract from a detailed and formal GNVQ progression agreement. Though prompted by the advent of GNVQs, it offers all students with a relevant qualification (BTEC, Access, GCE A levels) an interview and a place on certain diplomas and degrees listed in the agreement. The agreement specifies the criteria to be met by successful applicants to the university in terms of their GNVQ

programme and their personal performance. It requires successful students to be involved in return visits to the college to promote the university and its courses. It also details how a formative record of achievement should be generated and used in the progression process.

In the agreement shown in Figure 3, universities interview students in the first year of the GCE A level/GNVQ programme. Students are obliged to produce a portfolio or record of achievement based on the agreed work and projects they will carry out. They enter the second year of their programme knowing what they have to achieve and what evidence they have to provide in their portfolio. They then apply through UCAS in the usual way, but those satisfying the compact requirements are made a preferential offer.

The Surrey Compact



What is the Surrey COMPACT?

The COMPACT is an agreement between students, business partners, all post-16 schools and higher education in Surrey to facilitate the route, via higher education, to employment.

The students	will work towards goals set by higher education admissions tutors, building a portfolio of credit.
Schools and colleges	will deliver courses devised jointly with the higher education providers to meet their entry requirements, and with business partners.
Higher education	will offer local students a place conditional upon certain skills and areas of knowledge being achieved.
Business and industrial partners	will develop links with schools, colleges higher education to support students on COMPACT progression routes.

Surrey Higher Education Providers:
University of Surrey
Royal Holloway University of London
West Surrey College of Art & Design
St Mary's College & Roehampton Institute

Figure 3.

Consortium agreements

Though many progression agreements are bilateral, some schools, colleges and universities have come together to establish progression arrangements across the whole 14-19 phase and through the entire GNVQ framework. The establishment of a consortium made up of schools, sixth-form colleges, FE colleges and HEIs can achieve this. Of course, the development of such a set of arrangements has to take place within the context of some competition between post-16 providers increased by incorporation.

Consortia usually pre-date GNVQs, if only because they take time to establish and mature, and depend on:

- shared recognition of the need and commitment to raise progression levels among the regional population;
- a history of successful collaboration (i.e. franchising, Access programmes, special arrangements for non-traditional entrants);
- a recognition among HEIs that rationalisation of provision and an increase in student demand and retention rates can be achieved through such arrangements.

The consortium shown in Figure 4 includes two universities and 25 colleges and has a wider aim than the consideration of GNVQs for progression purposes.

The universities in this consortium have produced comprehensive advice on routes to HE programmes within the consortium by providing details on grade of GNVQ required together with areas of additionality.

The Salford Further Education/Higher Education Consortium

The overall aim of the Consortium is to develop a widely-based course provision, with a number of entry and recognised exit points, attractive to both the school leaver and the mature student. The Salford model links FE institutions with complementary aims and aspirations into the FE/HE Consortium, offering clearly defined pathways from the FE sector through to university graduation.

Aims include:

1. Profession to higher education for the students achieving an agreed standard at the partner institution.
2. Co-operation with new course development, including the implementation of GNVQs.
3. Co-operation in the maintenance of quality standards.
4. Co-operation on promotional activities and recruitment which emphasises progression opportunities.
5. Access to facilities at Salford for partner institutions, in order to enrich the FE programme.
6. Franchising of access provision to partner institutions.
7. Opportunities for staff development.

Figure 4.

For instance, entry to the B.Eng. (Hons) Microelectronic Control Engineering is Advanced GNVQ with a Maths or Science qualification (not necessarily at GCE A level); entry to B.Eng. (Hons) Audio and Video Systems is Advanced GNVQ at merit or distinction. Successful fulfilment of other conditions is required, including criteria on attendance, successful completion of course work, attendance at university open days and completion of a personal development programme.

A checklist for establishing a GNVQ progression agreement

Getting the information

Information on GNVQ centres, HEIs and their policies towards GNVQs can be obtained from the following :

- NCVQ or GNVQ awarding bodies — Business and Technician Education Council (BTEC), City and Guilds of London Institute (C&G) and the Royal Society of Arts (RSA) — have lists of centres offering GNVQs;
- the UCAS handbook includes a list of all HEIs;
- NCVQ can provide the specifications for all the mandatory units of all GNVQs and the core skill units, and awarding bodies can provide details of the optional and additional units they offer;
- The UCAS/NCVQ GATE Committee has produced a database of the requirements to be met by GNVQ applicants to each HEI (see Figure 5);
- Employment Department regional officers, LEAs and regional associations for FE may be able to provide some advice on aspects of local patterns of GNVQ provision and progression issues;
- LEAs will have details on all the schools in a locality, and the FEFC can provide similar information on the sixth form and further education colleges in a region.

Guidelines for all institutions

- Clarify the aims of the progression agreement and ensure that they are shared by all staff involved: it is essential that all staff involved in progression activities, and not just teaching staff, understand the agreement and their role in it;
- identify the direct and indirect benefits of the agreement for the institutions, students and staff;
- identify the start up and running costs of the agreement in terms of time and money and the cost of not developing an agreement;
- ensure there is a named person responsible for the agreement who is known throughout the institution, and that support systems for administering, recording and reporting on the arrangement exist;
- ensure the agreement is monitored and reviewed against its objectives by managers, staff and students.

Figure 6 provides detailed guidelines for HEIs and for GNVQ centres on establishing local GNVQ progression agreements.

Managing and steering GNVQ progression agreements

To make GNVQ progression agreements or compacts work, the university and the college need to develop clear guidelines, to have an agreed understanding of the criteria and standards to be met and a sound communication network.

The UCAS/NCVQ GATE Database

This database provides the address, telephone and fax number for each HEI in the country together with the name(s) and title(s) of staff who can be contacted about applications from students with GNVQs.

In some cases, the database shows the HEI's position on applications from students with GNVQs for individual programmes. For example, a single HEI entry might indicate that successful applicants to different programmes at the HEI will be expected to have:

- passed an Advanced GNVQ in Art and Design and compiled a satisfactory portfolio for entry to a degree in Design;
- passed with merit an Advanced GNVQ in Business, or passed and obtained six additional units for entry to an HND in Business;
- passed with distinction an Advanced GNVQ in Business, or passed with merit and obtained six additional units for entry to a degree in Business;
- passed with distinction an appropriate Advanced GNVQ for entry to a degree in Computing;
- passed with merit an Advanced GNVQ in Health and Social Care and obtained a grade C at GCE A level, or six additional units for entry to a degree in Physiotherapy;
- passed an Advanced GNVQ in a relevant subject and obtained a GCE A level in Maths for entry to a degree in Management Sciences.

HEIs might also stipulate their policy on GCSEs in English and Maths and core skills. Examples of the kind of statement made by HEIs include:

- if applicants have no GCSE C in Maths, they will be required to pass a maths entrance test in some areas;
- successful applicants to Business degrees will need grade B in GCSE Maths.

Figure 5.

As a minimum, the management of progression agreements needs a named liaison person at each institution whose duty it is to ensure that the agreement develops effectively, and that tutors are fully aware of the agreement. It is also useful to agree a timetable for the operation of any progression agreement showing key dates. An example of such a timetable is shown in Figure 7 on page 11.

The more formal and wide ranging the agreement, the more resources, mainly in staff time, will be required to negotiate and manage the agreement. Some consortia have full-time directors located at the HEI. In addition, the more formal agreements tend to be steered by committees set up either specifically for a GNVQ progression agreement or for GNVQ matters generally. In some cases, subject-based network groups involving centres and other interested bodies may be needed in order to act as curriculum development groups with particular reference to optional units within GNVQs .

GUIDELINES FOR ESTABLISHING LOCAL PROGRESSION AGREEMENTS

HEIs	GNVQ centres
Choose the HE programmes to be included In particular, those programmes that traditionally recruit locally and/or have accepted applicants with more established vocational qualifications (e.g. BTEC National Diplomas) and/or need recruitment stimulated.	
Target your GNVQ centre, i.e.: schools and colleges Identify GNVQ centres, considering, in particular, those that have established links with the institution for other purposes (e.g Access links or HE franchising). Not all schools and colleges offer GNVQs in all titles, but virtually every school or college offers at least some GNVQ titles.	**Target the HEI with regard to programme for progression** Choose a local HEI with HE programmes which are likely to be attractive to GNVQ graduates by referring to the GATE database to check the basic policy of the HEI and its position on GNVQ recruitment. Only then contact the HEI to discover any detailed position on accepting GNVQ graduates. In many cases, these programmes will be those with some history of recruiting students with vocational qualifications. Be aware that progress on reaching agreement with an HEI may be slow if the HEI is seeking agreements with many GNVQ centres.
Decide on the contents of the progression agreement and on any preferential offer Some progression agreements specify criteria to be met by students during their learning programme (for example, meeting assignment deadlines) as well as specifying programme content and progression procedures. Others specify such activities as taster programmes or mentoring sessions from HEI staff. All agreements need to stipulate how and when students will apply and be selected (for example, applications through UCAS in the usual way, followed by an interview or an interview prior to application).	**Consider what the centre might propose should be in the agreement** Remember that HE admissions staff are under considerable pressures and will find simple systems far more attractive than complicated ones.
Choose liaison staff to make contact with schools and college(s) offering GNVQs Make use of staff with previous experience of negotiations and liaison with other institutions.	**Choose liaison staff for agreement** Make use of staff with experience of negotiations with HEIs. These include those who have discussed GCE A-level progression to the institution or staff involved in Access or franchised degree programmes.
Make the initial approach or respond to a proposal from the GNVQ centre Be prepared for the meeting and ask for copies of the GNVQ specifications and examples of students work to be brought to the meeting. Although initial informal contact may be made with the college or school GNVQ co-ordinator, any formal contact should be made with the principal or head teacher at an early stage	**Make the initial approach to the HEI and/or respond to requests from the HEI** Be prepared with data (e.g. enrolment statistics, the GCSE profile of GNVQ students) and highlight the diversity and versatility of the GNVQ curriculum, staff teams and the centre. Although initial informal contact may be made with admissions tutors, any formal contact usually should be made through the registrar's office or school liaison officer at the HEI.
Consider requests from GNVQ centre GNVQ centres may have concerns about the progression agreement which have implications for the development of the agreement.	**Offer information and updating sessions to these HEIs as a way of raising awareness of the college and GNVQs** Arrange meetings with GNVQ students and staff teams to give admissions tutors the opportunity to talk to existing GNVQ students and examine GNVQ portfolios. Consider joint information sharing or development activities.
Fit the progression agreement to staff by modifications and/or staff development sessions to ensure a common understanding of the workings of the agreement Staff development sessions on GNVQs and/or the operation of the local agreement may be needed to support the agreement	**Fit progression agreement to staff by modifications and/or staff development sessions to ensure a common understanding of the workings of the agreement** Agreements may need to be supported by staff development sessions on HE admissions systems and the operation of the agreement.
Implement programme, review and amend agreement as required Agreements may need updating and developing as more GNVQs are introduced and more students progress through the GNVQ route.	
If the agreement is to be more formal, then it will be necessary to: **Draft a form of agreement** The agreement should be clear and explicit and may refer to other documents (e.g. the HEQC guidelines on the HE selection process shown in Figure 8). It may also be necessary to: Submit the agreement and any relevant preferential offer for approval to relevant decision-making authorities at all institutions involved in the agreement.	

Figure 6.

A Timetable for an Agreement

How one university operates its compact agreement

YEAR 1

Sept/Oct:	Academic board agrees with departments target courses for preferential offers
November:	Approves preferential offers and records of achievement (RoAs)
Jan/Feb:	Awareness raising by university staff in compact partner institutions
Mar/April:	Curriculum activities: projects with compact partner institutions

YEAR 2

Sept/Oct:	Interviews for potential compact students who complete UCAS forms
Nov/Dec:	University sends letters to compact students with contracts.
Jan/May:	Students decide to enter compact and place University as first choice.
July:	Compact partners send completed RoAs with summative statements to University
Aug:	Examinations results received, preferential offers confirmed or rejected. Clearing process commences.

De Montfort University

Figure 7.

HEQC Guidelines on the HE Selection Process

Guidelines on the selection process are available from the Higher Education Quality Council (HEQC). These advise institutions to:

- make the details of its selection process clear to applicants;
- ensure that staff responsible for admissions are aware of entry policy and criteria;
- ensure that admissions staff are conversant with the programme syllabus and available options;
- provide guidance to admissions staff on which students should be interviewed;
- ensure that the selection procedure used operates fairly for all types of applicants, regardless of their background;
- ensure that staff are suitably trained to select all types of applicants and make fair and sound judgements having regard to the admission criteria;
- ensure that satisfactory procedures are established for selecting applicants and that procedures are consonant with institutional policy.

Guidelines on Quality Assurance, HEQC 1994

Figure 8.

CONCLUSION

GNVQs are in their infancy. However, take-up has exceeded expectation. There is no doubt that, as well as having significant value as a preparation for employment, they will be used by many students as a preparation for study at HE. For HE institutions unfamiliar with the new qualifications and their programmes and assessment, the process of agreement described in these pages may offer significant advantages. For FE colleges, thinking ahead, planning for progression and aiming at partnerships with FE will give real advantages to GNVQ students. FEU (and its successor body) will return to these issues in future work on GNVQs, including long-term evaluation.

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APPENDIX

This compact, aimed primarily at HEIs, was drawn up by the NCVQ/UCAS GATE Committee in early 1994 to assist the development of progression agreements (referred to as 'compacts' in the protocol). It is reproduced here for use by HEIs and GNVQ centres containing, as it does, some very useful suggestions on the aims and management of GNVQ progression agreements (compacts).

GENERAL NATIONAL VOCATIONAL QUALIFICATIONS (GNVQs) and ACCESS TO HIGHER EDUCATION (GATE) COMMITTEE

COMPACT PROTOCOL

Introduction

1 All HEIs in England Wales and Northern Ireland are invited through the GNVQ and Access to Higher Education (GATE) Committee, representing national bodies, to enter into compacts with local colleges and schools providing GNVQ programmes which will start in September 1992 onwards. The compacts will report to the GATE Committee. This protocol outlines how the compacts are expected to operate.

Aims

2 The GNVQs are expected to be developed further, based on the experience of schools and colleges introducing the qualifications. The compacts will enable HEIs to contribute to the development of GNVQs. The aims of these compacts are:

(a) to keep HEIs informed about the progress of GNVQ programmes;

(b) to keep schools and colleges informed about HE admissions procedures and access policies;

(c) to provide an opportunity for HEIs to advise schools and colleges and the GATE Committee about the acceptability of GNVQ programmes for entry into degree and other courses;

(d) to enable HE to contribute to the development of GNVQs.

Agreement

3 Compacts are entered into voluntarily by HEIs and schools or colleges to fulfil the aims listed above, and can be terminated by either party. Reasons for termination of a compact should be disclosed to the GATE Committee as well as to the other party.

Liaison officers

4 Each HEI, school or college will name someone to act as a liaison officer through whom all enquiries will be directed. The liaison officer will provide information and advice, as required, to their counterpart, consult colleagues, arrange meetings and visits, keep records about the progress of the compact, and report periodically to the GATE Committee.

Information and advice

5 It is expected that HEIs will want to familiarise themselves with the context of GNVQs, the quality of teaching and learning provided, the validity and reliability of the modes of assessment used, profiles and other means of recording achievement, methods of grading students, and views of students about their courses. Some mutually agreed method should be found for providing this information.

6 Schools and colleges will want reassurance from HEIs that Advanced GNVQs will be accepted as an appropriate qualification by admission tutors for entry into degree and other courses. They will also want to be kept appraised of access policies and admissions procedures which are likely to affect their students. The GNVQ is a new qualification and staff in schools and colleges will need guidance about how to advise students applying for entry into HE. They will require specific guidance about the choice of optional and additional units, and the completion of application forms. Some mutually agreed method should be found for providing this information and advice.

7 The GATE Project Manager, will provide details of the UCAS GNVQ qualifications to the liaison officer in each participating institution.

8 The GATE Project Manager will undertake to network information and keep participating institutions up to date.

Confidentiality

9 The sharing of information relating to particular institutions will be subject to the agreement of the schools, colleges and HEIs involved.

Meetings and visits

10 It is likely that staff from HEIs will wish to visit schools and colleges in the compact and vice versa. This will be voluntary and the costs, as with other costs, will be met by the participating institutions.

Records

11 Institutions will be expected to keep records of any information and advice provided, or received, of meetings and visits, and the progress of the compact. The GATE Committee will bring together this information with the approval of compact institutions and disseminate it for the benefit of other institutions.

FURTHER INFORMATION

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